

Cowley Motion Working Group
Report to Bishop's Council – July 2020

In January 2020 a group from across the Diocese came together to work on the Cowley Deanery Motion, to consider the best way forward and make recommendations to Bishop's Council for the next steps.

Group membership:

Revd Canon Verena Breed (Chair)
 Revd Canon Geoff Bayliss
 Revd Alice Goodall
 Canon Mark Humphriss (Diocesan Secretary)
 Revd Miri Keen
 Ms Jayne Ozanne
 Revd John Tattersall (Chair DBF)
 Mr Edward Weiss
 Revd Derek Witchell (Chair DAC)
 Mr Ian Barnetson (retired from the group in April due to work commitments)

In attendance:

Ms Liz Kitch (Secretary DAC)
 Mrs Liz Holloway (Secretary to the Group)

The original Cowley Motion was the starting point:

In the light of the Oxford Diocese's commitment to becoming a Christlike Church that is courageous, compassionate and contemplative we ask that the Oxford Diocesan Synod:

- I) recognise the significant level of inequality that exists across the diocese that enables some parishes to have churches that are "fit for purpose" whilst other parishes struggle to provide even the most basic of facilities such as running water,
 and
- II) commission a Working Group that will propose how best to provide urgent practical support and funding to those parishes that are most in need of basic facilities so as to enable them to fulfil their mission.

1) Process

In order to gauge the level of inequality that exists between the churches across the diocese, the group, working together with the DAC team, developed a questionnaire to be sent out to all parishes.

As a first step the group defined "basic facilities" – the existence of mains water, foul water drainage, electricity, gas, heating, lighting, toilet, sink, hot water, hearing loop and level access in and around the building.

Within the context of this paper we have considered the above elements of 'basic facilities'. The lack of a facility may or may not be a limiting factor on the mission of the church. There is further work to be done in this area which will take into account the local situation.

The questionnaire was sent to the first church warden in all parishes. The average response rate to the questionnaire was 53%. Of the churches that responded, a significant number (46%) indicated that they lacked some of what the group defined as 'basic facilities'. It was noted that a good proportion of churches that responded and said they lacked basic facilities are in rural areas (see Appendix Table 1).

The impact of the provision of basic facilities on a church's ability to fulfil its mission needs to be qualitative rather than quantitative so that rural parishes are not pushed out by numerically larger churches. In other words, it needs to recognise that whilst the absolute number of people affected by such a change may be small, the provision of basic facilities may have a significant impact for both the worshipping community and the wider community.

2) Diocesan Vision

Our strong Diocesan Vision calls us to become a more Christlike Church, more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous for the sake of God's world.

What does this mean for the work of this group and the decisions to follow up on the findings?

- Contemplative: Prayerful discernment of God's will
- Compassionate: Striving with compassion for fairness, standing up against deprivation and lack of privilege
- Courageous: Stepping out in faith – setting out to fish in deep waters

3) Underlying Principles

- a) All parishes are called to grow the Kingdom of God in their community.
- b) It is desirable that all church buildings should have basic facilities, unless the future of a church building or parish is considered unviable or unless a parish has stated that it does not see basic facilities as key to its mission. What matters is that where a church is limited in its mission by a lack of facilities, they are enabled to have access to them.
- c) No church needs to justify the need of basic facilities; however, due to financial limitations we recognise that any programme to respond to the need will have to prioritise and determine which churches need help more urgently than others.
- d) We recognise that there may be a number of barriers to achieving buildings that are fit for purpose:
 - i) Some struggling parishes may not be able to identify or articulate God's vision for their church at this time and may need help to do this.
 - ii) Some may lack people with sufficient skills, time or drive to see through a process of equipping their church building with basic facilities.
 - iii) For many parishes, lack of money or access to money is a significant factor together with inexperience in fund raising.
- e) In prioritising which needs are most urgent, there are a range of factors that should be taken into account, including:
 - i) the church's vision for the building's future use
 - ii) the potential impact on worship and fellowship for the church community
 - iii) the potential impact on the wider community
 - iv) whether an alternative church building with the required facilities is in immediate proximity.
- f) The Development Fund already has a set of criteria that work well and could be adopted.
- g) It might be investigated whether two churches that are only a couple of miles apart both need basic facilities. An in depth look at the communities within a Benefice and the dynamics between them may be needed to make sensible decisions about this, and the DAC team are currently exploring a means of doing this.
- h) For some churches, the need to address significant structural or roofing problems takes initial priority over the need for basic facilities.
- i) Some of the churches in most need of help will be the ones least likely to seek out help, lacking people with sufficient skills, drive or belief that anything could make a difference. Identifying these churches is a challenging but important task.
- j) The costs for installing basic facilities can vary considerably from one church to another and is impacted by the layout of the church, the availability of existing services and the type of solution required to appropriately serve the building and its congregation. As a basic indicator, the installation of a toilet may cost between £30,000 and £50,000, the introduction of an electric

heating system in a small church approximately £15,000 and the replacement of a hot water heating system in a small church between £60,000 and £80,000.

4) Recommendations

We recommend to Bishop's Council that:

- 1. Oxford Diocese adopt the resolution that all parishes should be enabled to have buildings which allow parishes to fulfil their vision to grow the Kingdom of God in their community.**
- 2. Dedicated funding is allocated with which to help parishes equip their church buildings with basic facilities.**
- 3. Consideration is given to quick access dedicated funding also being available to address structural and roofing issues as these issues also matter.**
- 4. Ways in which practical assistance can be offered to parishes should be identified, including suggested sources of potential funding.**
- 5. Consideration is given as to what financial priority be given to the needs of these parishes in relation to the Diocese's other priorities.**
- 6. Oxford Diocese commits to reporting back to Synod annually on progress made.**

Further work would need to be done in order to:

- a) identify all parishes whose church buildings do not have basic facilities (whilst we have a good response rate to the questionnaire and can assume this is indicative of the number of churches with inadequate basic facilities, it does not give us a list of all churches in the Diocese without basic facilities). The data collected can then be brought alongside data that is already held by the Diocese.
- b) identify which parishes should be prioritised as needing help, both financially and with human resources.
- c) assess financial need which might involve both the parish's ability to pay share and indicators of deprivation for that area.
- d) assess human resources to identify parishes that haven't got the local expertise to work through grant applications, approach major donors and/or manage projects.
- e) take a proactive approach in identifying and assisting the most struggling churches.
- f) remind parishes that the Department of Mission and the Parish Development Advisers are willing to assist parishes with identifying and articulating God's vision for their parish.
- g) in addition to the DAC team, identify expertise from across the Diocese to support parishes in equipping their church buildings with basic facilities, including:
 - i) people who have successfully driven a building project through and are willing to give time and advice to another parish
 - ii) individuals who would be willing to help a struggling parish by completing faculty applications and grant applications with them.
 - iii) The rejuvenating effect on a community of forming fund raising bodies should not be underestimated. A good deal of support could come through intra deanery assistance in helping to set up these bodies.
- h) explore and produce a framework for investigating the structure and dynamics of how church buildings operate within a Benefice.

Appendix

Basic Facility	No of rural churches without	No of urban churches without	% of responses
Mains Water	100	7	24%
Foul water drainage	172	35	46%
Electricity	2	0	0.4%
Gas	243	27	61%
Heating	19	1	4%
Lighting	10	3	3%
Toilet	161	23	41%
Sink	131	11	32%
Hot water	158	22	40%
Hearing Loop	153	23	39%
Level access in and around the building	143	35	40%

Table 1: number of churches lacking basic facilities in rural and urban areas